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Dec. 11, 1967
Ala. Assoc. of Soil
and Water Cons.

THE FUTURE OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

I'm happy to be in Alabama with this great group. I am substituting for Kenneth E. Grant, Associate Administrator of the Soil Conservation Service, who was scheduled to be your speaker. Mr. Grant's plans were changed by an assignment from the Secretary of Agriculture.

I thank your president, Ed Grant, for inviting us to be with you. In the time I have, let me divide my discussion between the future of soil and water conservation districts and the role of watershed and river basin planning and development.

The protection, improvement, and development of our soil and water resources is the rock upon which the future will be built. For three decades soil and water conservation districts have been the key unit of government through which citizens could participate in planning and installing the soil and water conservation measures needed to protect and improve the land.

This procedure has been highly successful. Some 3,000 conservation districts have been organized. Their accomplishments are many. Soil and water conservation has come a long way during the past 30 years. The main reason is the leadership of the districts, of men like you and your counterparts across the Nation.

I am devoted to soil conservation districts and the men who run them, and have been all of my professional life. Several years ago I expressed my deep respect and admiration for you and for the work in which you are engaged

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Address by Hollis R. Williams, Deputy Administrator for Watersheds, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., at the annual meeting of the Alabama Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors, Birmingham, Alabama, December 11, 1967.

in these words:

There is no more essential unit of our free government than the soil conservation districts, surely no set of public servants so unselfish and so dedicated.

"Supervisor" has become an honored title.

No scandal has been attached to it. No selfish purpose has corrupted it. Money can't buy it.

It knows no party. It knows no favorite.

It is honorable and dignified and exemplifies, more than any title I know, the good qualities of public service.

The supervisor is a man of the soil, but he is distinguished by his vision and his willingness to assume leadership.

He is a good citizen and a considerate neighbor.

His face is bronzed by the wind and the sun and his hands are rough from a life of toil, but in his heart is a love and concern for his fellow man.

To him, conservation is a profession as well as a duty.

Neither the doctor nor the lawyer, the teacher nor the minister, surpasses him in the unselfishness of his devotion to the well-being of his community, and of the human race.

And he has taken to heart the words of the Psalmist who told us that the earth is the Lord's and he has stood guard for the Lord.

Yes, the conservation district supervisor is somebody very special. We who are well-fed and well-clothed and who see opportunity spread out before us for ourselves and our children are forever indebted to him.

That is my tribute to the soil and water conservation district and its supervisors, written many years ago. I still believe in every word of it.

As leaders of the soil and water conservation movement in Alabama you have performed, and are continuing to perform, a lasting service in guiding the farm landowners and operators of your districts toward operations consistent with the principles of conservation land use.

Soil and water conservation districts have become a permanent part of the Alabama scene, for they are in the tradition of American democracy. They are organized and managed by local people who recognize their own problems and who wish to be masters of their own fate in dealing with them.

Within the last 20-years, the concept of resource conservation has broadened tremendously. It has come to mean protecting land against all forms of soil deterioration, rebuilding eroded and depleted soils, building up soil fertility, stabilizing critical runoff and sediment-producing areas, improving grasslands, woodlands, and wildlife lands, conserving water for industrial and municipal as well as other uses, proper agricultural irrigation and drainage, and reducing floodwater sediment damage for benefits to the public as a whole.

Soil and water conservation today includes planning and treating complete watersheds as resource units. This means coordinating the management of crop, range, pasture and forest lands and the treatment of water-courses in the upper watersheds to minimize the damage of floods and sediment and to improve the quality and regularity of water supplies.

As soil and water conservationists, we all have a vital role to play in these changing times. We must assume larger challenges and take advantage

of opportunities to prepare our districts for a larger and broader role in the days ahead.

Soil and water conservation districts and the Soil Conservation Service must look ahead, not backward. As Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "It is not so important where we stand -- as it is the direction in which we are going".

We must look at our programs and our techniques to see that they are up to date, that they meet today's needs. We must be alert to new ideas. We must continually bring new blood into our organizations and be stimulated by their thinking. We must see the whole picture and not just what appeals to us most or what interests us most.

We have become an urban nation. Seventy percent of our people now live in only one percent of the space available in the Nation. If the present trend continues, by the year 2,000 four out of five Americans will live in metropolitan areas. Thus the will and the facilities to cope adequately with our resource problems at the local State and National level is largely in the hands of the urban people.

Our urban people must be made aware that our strength as a people and as a Nation, our future greatness in the world society -- all this and more are wrapped up in our land and water resources.

If our urban people, who will have a large voice in shaping the future, are to attain the understanding that is essential to decisive action, it will only come about through leadership of soil and water conservation districts. You are local experts in resource development and management. You must inform and enlist the aid of non-farmers, indeed urge them to join us in good resource conservation work.

For various reasons, more and more urban people are becoming aware of their stake in land and water resource conservation and use. They are, and will be increasingly turning to you -- the district leaders -- for help and information.

I believe you can strengthen districts and broaden their scope and purpose by inviting the leadership of nonagricultural conservation interests to participate with you in your activities at the local district level and at your State association level.

I don't mean invite these people to an occasional board meeting, or give them a place on the program now and then at your State association meetings. What I do mean is to make them a working part of your organization. Get them on your committees. Take advantage of their experience. Seek their advice. Consult with them. Make them familiar with your program and your objectives. Give them jobs to do that are within their field of interest and will aid your program as well as theirs.

This job is so big that there is room for all. You might be surprised to learn how much other organizations and unattached citizens want to help if they but knew how and if they knew that you wanted them and could use them. You might also be surprised to learn that other organizations not organized under State law, as districts are, envy your status and your authority and would be delighted to have you help them with projects of theirs that should be in your overall work program anyhow.

Conversely, some organizations have authorities you do not have but can get the advantage of by working with them closely -- by making them a part of your family.

I know you are at work on this in Alabama and that you will push ahead with it. Let me emphasize one thing about updated work programs. I urge you to strive for quality programs -- programs that fully reflect all the present and longtime resource needs of the community.

By all the resource needs I mean all: not just the agricultural land needs; not just the watershed protection and flood prevention needs; not just the farm and ranch needs and problems. I mean all -- truly all -- of the community needs. I mean municipal and industrial water supply now and for the future. I mean parks and playgrounds and recreation areas. I mean swimming and boating and fishing and other water-based tourism. I mean new local industries that improve the economic welfare of the community. I mean those things that directly concern all citizens in all walks of life.

Each district must become a great deal more than an erosion control or a water conservation district, operated mainly by farmers and for farmers. It must broaden its scope to include activities that interest and benefit every member of the community, rural and urban alike.

For 30 years soil conservation districts have given magnificent leadership in achieving their objectives on farmlands. That is still a basic part of the job. But the need today is for much more -- so very much more.

At this moment in time every district has an unparalleled opportunity to become the resource development leader of every community in the land with wider powers to make decisions and to act. But this will not "just happen." It will take work-hard work. And the place to begin is with a quality updated work program.

Soil and water conservation districts hold the key to the future of our land and water resources. Our best hopes rest upon your leadership and vision, your ability to make and carry out long-range multiple-use programs for land and water, and your initiative and persuasiveness in enlisting the support and active participation of our urban people.

I especially wish to commend you for your progress on the small watershed program.

Alabama has submitted 55 applications for watershed project assistance in our office, covering some 3,916,000 acres. Of these, 22 have been completed or approved for operations, while another 10 are authorized for planning assistance. This is indeed good progress. I understand too that the program is receiving support from people in all walks of life. One reason for this support is that it benefits all of the people living within the watershed and in many cases those who live outside the watershed boundary.

State Conservationist Bill Lingle tells me that with the help and leadership of your Association, the State of Alabama is contributing some \$75,000 for the next two years for watershed planning. You are to be congratulated on this fine accomplishment.

A few statistics will help to highlight the magnitude of the small watershed program nationally. As of December 1, 1967, applications for assistance on 2,689 watersheds had been received from sponsoring local organizations. These applications came from 49 States and Puerto Rico. Of these, 1,348 had been authorized for planning and 827 for operations. Construction had been completed on 191. About 64 percent of the projects have been authorized for operation since 1960. The 2,689 applications include over 196 million acres of land.

Since 1962, there has been a very rapid growth in water-based recreational developments in small watersheds. Developments have been planned that will be used by more than 5 million people a year in about 150 communities in 35 States. Included will be recreational opportunities such as fishing, camping, picnicking, boating, water skiing and many other forms of water-based recreation. In addition, the sediment pools of more than 4,000 floodwater-retarding dams furnish recreational opportunities to local communities where such facilities previously have not been available.

Multiple-purpose projects have expanded rapidly. More than half of the projects now authorized have dual or triple purposes including municipal and industrial water supply, recreation, irrigation, drainage, fish and wildlife, and flood prevention. If pending legislation is approved, groundwater recharge, water quality management, and beautification are likely to become more significant project objectives over the next few years.

Of the 92 watershed work plans completed during fiscal year 1966, 70 (or 76 percent) included one or more purposes in addition to watershed protection and flood prevention. Twenty-five States, accounting for 56 of these work plans, were 100 percent in achieving multiple-purpose objectives.

Construction was first started on P.L. 566 projects during the 1957 fiscal year. By the end of the 1961 fiscal year, a 5-year period, construction had been started on 204 watershed projects.

Since 1961 the rate of new construction starts has increased to an average of 65 per year. During the 1967 fiscal year new construction starts were made on 59 watershed projects, bringing the total construction starts to 589. The number of floodwater-retarding dams installed under the small watershed program has more than doubled during the last five year.

The number increased from 1,954 through 1961 to a cumulative total of 4,316 in 1966. The miles of channel improvement have more than tripled during the same 5-year period -- from 1,000 miles in 1961 to 3,234 miles through 1966 fiscal year. Most of this channel improvement is to reduce floodwater damages. However, a significant amount provides outlets for needed agricultural drainage systems.

The funds obligated for watershed operations are another easily understood measure of the growth of the program. The total funds obligated increased from approximately \$89.7 million in 1961 fiscal year to approximately \$157 million in fiscal year 1967. About 39 percent of these funds were contributed from non-Federal sources -- local organizations and State governments.

Broad-based planning is essential if we are to realize the full potential of our land and water resources. The USDA is strengthening its commitment to the regional, multiple-purpose approach to resource conservation through cooperative programs, including river basin studies, small watershed projects, and resource conservation and development projects that accelerate going programs on a regional basis, and other programs.

USDA currently is participating in 52 comprehensive river basin studies. Ten of these are comprehensive framework studies of major water resource regions within which more detailed studies will need to be made. Their purposes include the identification of water and related land-use problems within the water resource regions, and the determination of alternative approaches to the solution of these problems.

The basic reason for USDA participation in river basin studies is to assist in determining how, where and when its project-type programs can be effectively used to meet the needs for water and related land resource developments and to assure that agricultural interests are recognized and protected in such developments. These studies also provide local people with the information needed to make rational decisions as to which project-type activities will make the greatest contribution toward meeting their immediate needs and to the attainment of their long-term objectives.

As a member agency of the Water Resources Council, established by the Water Resources Planning Act of 1965, the USDA participates in a continuing study of the adequacy of water supplies required in each water resources region in the Nation. The Council's first such assessment is being made this year.

The more detailed river basin studies identify project developments which are needed within the next 15 years. In these studies, various water resource development needs are identified both as to scale of development, geographic locations, and purposes to be included.

Detailed river basin studies provide a means of identifying and analyzing competitive water uses, and of determining the economic and social impact of selecting one competitive use over another where both cannot be satisfied.

A major purpose of detailed river basin studies is to identify watershed protection projects and flood prevention projects which can help to meet the total needs of the river basin. In most cases, these studies involve specific project objectives of the State or local agencies.

Emphasis is placed on water-resource problems of the concerned State and an analysis of the potentials of Public Law 566 projects in meeting the needs of the State or local agency.

Already small watershed projects have reduced flood damages by more than \$58 million.

Already small watershed projects have resulted in erosion control and grassland improvement valued at \$85 million.

Already small watershed projects have reduced sediment pollution by over 6-1/2 million tons.

Small watershed projects are playing a successful role in community development in the United States. The watershed program offers a fresh approach to community progress and development. These projects can serve the interests of both town and country people. The multiple-purpose nature of the program accounts for a large part of its success. These projects help to protect existing community resources and bring in new ones that provide more jobs, more business and thus boost the entire economy of the community.

I am especially pleased to see that you, the District Supervisors, are taking the leadership in advancing the small watershed program here in Alabama.

Let me leave you with this thought:

You are engaged in the greatest crusade in the history of this land we love -- to protect, develop and improve our soil and water resources. How well you succeed in this noble task will determine, in large measure, whether we and our children and their children will prosper in the years to come or whether we shall go down the road of the lost civilizations that have preceded ours -- the greatest one of all. I'm sure we shall not fail.

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JAN 11 1968

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